



Leslie Blatteau

President, New Haven Federation of Teachers
Testimony Regarding HB 6662 and HB 6663

Good evening Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel and members of the Education Committee. My name is Leslie Blatteau and I am a teacher, parent, and resident in the City of New Haven. I am the President of the New Haven Federation of Teachers, a union representing over 1700 educators in New Haven Public Schools. I am also an At-Large Vice President of AFT-CT, a 30,000 member strong statewide union representing 10,000 teachers and educators in Connecticut. Both NHFT and AFT-CT belong to Recovery For All – a statewide coalition fighting for a better future for Connecticut, bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations. I am testifying today about HB 6662 and HB 6663.

Given the current issues we face in public schools throughout our state, specifically the educator/paraprofessional shortage and the increase in our students' academic, social, and emotional needs, it is concerning that the Governor's budget fails to fully fund public education. Because of underfunding, CT has 1,322 unfilled paraeducator positions and 1,221 teacher vacancies (CSDE, Sept 2022). In this time of increased need in schools and classrooms, large budget surpluses in Hartford, and the continued amassing of extreme wealth by Connecticut's billionaires, it is hard to believe the Governor is considering flat funding public education.

To put it simply, the Governor's budget does not go far enough to address the long term impact of Connecticut's inequitable system of school funding. At a minimum, the State of CT should fully fund the Excess Cost Grant to ensure that our students' with special needs get the individualized attention they deserve and schools have the capacity to hire and retain certified staff to meet our students' needs. And at a minimum, the State of CT should fully fund the ECS formula this year; the Governor's proposed phase-in will perpetuate a reality in our state where

some children will have access to an engaging, well-funded, and developmentally appropriate education designed to meet the needs of the whole child and others simply will not. And we know this disparity impacts our students of color, our low income students, our students with special needs, and our English language learners the most. Connecticut must do better.

To focus on the needs of our English Language Learners, we absolutely support HB 6663 and believe that the rights of English Language Learners, their parents, and families, as well as immigrant and refugee students and their families, must be protected. In fact, we brought some of these very concerns to the negotiating table last fall. We believe our students should have learning materials in their home language as well as English. We believe our educators supporting our English Language Learners should have appropriate resources and teacher/student ratios so they can build off our students' strengths and support their ongoing development. But without additional funding to ensure our schools can meet our English Language Learners' needs, we are concerned about the implementation of this bill. Given we already face a shortage of bilingual educators in our city and state, and educator depletion and burnout is at an all time high, I worry that this bill is a potential unfunded mandate, that could cause even more depletion and burnout among our bilingual educators and staff who are already doing so much with so little. With that said, I will reiterate the need for action from our elected officials - my daughter is a second grader in New Haven and I learned from her over the weekend that one of her bilingual classmates serves as the translator for another Pashto speaking newcomer to her school. While we can marvel at the skills her 7 year old classmate possesses, we, the adults in charge of our institutions, must intervene so all students have the support they need to learn and thrive.

In closing, if we want to guarantee and protect the rights of students and families in our state, we must fully fund and fully staff our public schools.